

WHITE, REV. HENRY G.

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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Henry G. White

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HARRY L. GLADDEN
THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
309 KENMORE ROAD
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

July 19, 1950

Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
Fort Wayne 1, Indiana

Attention: Dr. Warren

Dear Dr. Warren:

Enclosed is the copy of the address which my pastor, Henry G. White, gave to the congregation assembled for the Sunday Morning Worship Service held in the Sanctuary of the Irvington Methodist Church, February 12, 1950. This address was also delivered to the Cathedral Hour audience at the Scottish Rite Cathedral on another Sunday in February.

Trusting this material will serve as a help to you, and expressing my appreciation for your contribution at the Convention, I am,

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "H. L. Gladden".

Harry L. Gladden



**The Life of
ABRAHAM LINCOLN - TREE OF MERCY**

**By
Henry G. White, Pastor
THE IRVINGTON METHODIST CHURCH
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA**

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN - TREE OF MERCY"

The life of the Great Emancipator, given on Lincoln Sunday,
February 12, 1950, in The Irvington Methodist Church, Indianapolis
by the pastor, Rev. Henry G. White.

About the middle of the Eighteenth Century, there came to Hingham, Massachusetts, from the west of England, eight men named Lincoln. Numbered among their descendants were a Governor of Massachusetts, a Governor of Maine, and a Secretary of State. After the Revolution, the family began to move out; to New Jersey, thence to Pennsylvania, and on into Virginia. One of the Virginia Lincolns caught the spirit of adventure from his cousin, Daniel Boone, sold his farm, and took his family through Cumberland Gap and down the Wilderness Road into Kentucky. There they worked in the clearing by day and lived by night in the stockade with the other pioneers. One day a marauding Indian shot and killed the father. The death was a terrible blow to the family and left the widow destitute. The youngest son, Thomas, was only ten, but he began doing rough farm work to help support the family. On the side, he learned the trade of a cabinet-maker, and became such a skilled craftsman that he owned his own farm at twenty-five. He was a quiet, determined sort of man, a good story-teller, and in the crude way of the pioneer, religious.

In 1806 Thomas Lincoln married Nancy Hanks, descendant of a family of early Massachusetts settlers, who had been orphaned at nine. They moved into a log cabin in Elizabethtown, where they were recognized as good substantial citizens. It was here on Feb. 12, 1809 that Nancy gave Thomas Lincoln his only son, and they named him Abraham. It was a good name. It was the name of his grandfather who had been killed by the Indian. More, it was a Biblical name, and in this case strangely prophetic. Perhaps no man ever had more reason to be disillusioned with men and their institutions, but like Abraham of old, Abe Lincoln was to be a man of faith - faith in his fellow men, faith in the will of the people. Thus he was born of sturdy pioneer stock, with the strong will of New England, the rugged strength of the Alleghanys, the richness of the Virginia hills, and the danger and humor of Kentucky bred in him.

The boy grew tall and strong. Out of her poor store of knowledge Nancy Hanks steeped him in Bible lore and country legends and the rudiments of learning. He sat open-mouthed listening to the strong meat of itinerant preachers. As soon as he was strong enough, he went with his father into the field to learn the hard labor and the sweet tiredness of those who till the prairie soil.

In 1816 the fascination of the frontier fastened on Thomas Lincoln, and the family set out for Little Pigeon Creek in Spencer County, Indiana. It was a hard journey and a sad one for Nancy; but for young Abe it was a wonderful journey into the unknown. The wagon overturned in the Ohio River and most of the stores were lost, so that their beginning in the new land was almost primitive. In the cabin in which they lived there was no window, door, or floor. Their furniture was made of rough slabs of wood; their bedclothes were undressed skins. Their food was wild berries and game, fish, corn-dodgers, and potatoes their only vegetable.

Two years after they had settled in Indiana Nancy Hanks Lincoln died and left the home forlorn, a pioneer sacrifice at 36. A few weeks later David Elkins, a traveling Elder of the Methodist Church, spoke a few simple words over her grave.

Now a man in the wilderness with children and no wife is like a bird without wings. So the next day Thomas Lincoln left Sarah under the care of ten year old Abe, and headed for Elizabethtown, Kentucky, once more to call on Sarah Johnson, whose late husband had been his friend.

He went straight to her house and said, "I have no wife and you no husband. I come a purpose to marry you. I've no time to lose; and if you're willin' let's get it done straight off."

Her matter-of-fact answer was, "I've got debts."

Thomas Lincoln took all the bills and paid them off, returned to Sarah and said, "The debts are paid; now let's go."

Her final ultimatum was, "I won't go without my furniture."

So Tom Lincoln bought four horses and a wagon, married Sarah Johnson, loaded all her household goods, and headed back toward his little ones in the lonesome hills of southern Indiana.

One morning they pulled into the clearing. Tom Lincoln pointed to the strong, rosy woman, with the kindly face and sparkling eyes and said, "Here is your new mammy." She put her arms around the children and pulled them close against her, as a mother hen tucks lost chicks under the soft feathers of her wing. Then she gave Abe a bath. She swept out the dried leaves that had been his bed and tucked him for the first time in his life into the billowy softness of a feather mattress.

Young Abe began to grow tall and robust. He was strong and hard to best at any sport, but he was gentle; once he shot a wild turkey and never cared to hunt again.

He was beginning to get a desultory kind of education. All his formal schooling together did not amount to more than a year, but he could read and his appetite for knowledge was voracious. He worked for the privilege of borrowing books until he had read everyone in a circuit of fifty miles from his home.

His life in Indiana was crude, but there was nothing ignoble or mean about the life of the Indiana pioneer. If it lacked in culture and refinement, it was rich in independence and self reliance.

In 1830, when Abe was 22, the family moved to Illinois. Now he struck out for himself. He was 6'4" tall. He could out-lift, out-work, and out-wrestle any man he met. He was good natured, skilled in debate and story-telling, and he was kind. Late one night he was returning with some other boys from thrashing. They saw something along side the road. It was a man sleeping off his drunk in the freezing mud. The boys couldn't waken him, and the others left Abe alone with the sodden man. He stepped into the mud, lifted the man onto his shoulders, and carried him four miles to Dennis Hanks' cabin, where he built a fire and rubbed the man warm.

Abe became in turn a rail-splitter, ploughman, and boatman. After the Black-Hawk War he went into the store business with William Berry. Berry drank and gambled away the profits, while Lincoln read Shakespeare and studied law instead of attending to business. Berry soon drank himself to death, and all the debts of the store fell upon Lincoln's shoulders. Instead of resorting to bankruptcy law, Abe spent the next fifteen years of his life paying off those debts. Men began to call him "Honest Abe" because of his fair-dealing.

His popularity was growing, and he was elected to the State Assembly. He moved to Springfield and opened a law office.

There was one interlude in Lincoln's budding political life. In 1842, after a rather stormy courtship, he married Mary Todd. She was gay, ambitious, and precise;

Abe was inclined toward melancholy, sometimes uncouth, and often inattentive. Because of their opposite temperments, their relationship together was sometimes discordant, although they were always deeply in love with one another.

Lincoln was a mystical giant of a man. His clothes always appeared as though he had been thinking about something else when he had put them on. The stove-pipe hat on his head was like a dark attic perched atop a tall building and was usually stuffed with legal papers. His features were craggy and solemn. He liked to tell the story of meeting with a man who handed him a pistol saying, "I promised long ago that if I ever met a man uglier than myself I would hand him this pistol and tell him to shoot me." Lincoln swore he answered, after searching the fellow's face, "Well, if I am uglier than you are, go ahead and shoot". Yet, he was possessed of a strange dignity, and when he spoke his whole body was lighted with warmth.

After one defeat as a candidate for Congress, Lincoln ran again and was elected. On his way to make a speech during this campaign he saw a pig mired in the mud and climbed down from the buggy to loose it, saying to his companion that he couldn't have made a good speech with the thought of that struggling pig in his mind.

In November of 1847 Lincoln went to Washington. All his life he had been thrown up against slavery. His parents had taught him to abhor it. Once in Kentucky he had seen a group of "blacks" strung in chains upon a rope like so many fish upon a trout-line. In Washington he began to realize the utter impossibility of every reconciling the Northern conviction that slavery was a moral evil, and the Southern claim that it was a divine necessity. He had a foreboding that someday the issue must be resolved.

He returned to his law practice in Springfield at the close of his term with heavy financial obligations hanging over him. He was still paying off the debts of the New Salem store and he was supporting his mother and father.

Yet, no matter how pressing his personal burdens, he never lost his droll sense of humor. To a New York firm that wrote asking him about the financial standing of a Springfield man, he replied:

First of all he has a wife and baby; together they ought to be worth \$500,000. to any man. Secondly he has an office in which there is a table worth \$1.50, and three chairs worth, say, \$1.00. Last of all there is in one corner a large rat hole, which will bear looking into.

Respectfully,

A. Lincoln

His own family was growing now. He had two boys of his own that he loved to carry about the streets on his shoulders. He was going regularly to the Presbyterian Church with his wife, although he never became a formal member. He established a reputation as a lawyer who would not take a case that was legally right but morally wrong. Wherever he saw injustice he was quick to offer his services to the wronged party. The poor he would defend without a fee.

He once took clear to the Supreme Court a case for an orphan girl who had been cheated out of a piece of land by her guardian. While the case was in litigation, the young girl was married. Lincoln won the case and the newly married couple came to ask what he was going to charge them. He told them that all he would ask would be their thanks; they were to accept his services as a wedding present. Judge Davis once said to him, "Lincoln, you are impoverishing this bar by your picayune charges of fees."

It was the slave question that brought Lincoln back into politics, and his debate with Douglass in Chicago established his fame as the orator of the Midwest. He disavowed all prejudice against the southern people and he spoke soberly and without vindictiveness. He argued from the Christian faith that men created equal in the sight of God have no moral right to make slaves one of the other; and from the first principle of American democracy that no man is good enough to govern another without his consent.

The struggle between the North and the South grew more bitter every day. Lincoln was deeply troubled by the beginning violence. In that year, 1856, on the Missouri and Kansas border, 200 men, women, and children were shot, stabbed, or burned to death in the fighting between free- and slave - state settlers. Lincoln solemnly declared, "A house divided against itself cannot stand. This government cannot endure half slave and half free."

Men of like conviction began to gather from all the political parties, and the Republican Party was the result of their common concern. By acclamation, the members of the new party called on Abe to make the closing speech of their first convention. It was that speech which put Lincoln on the track for the Presidency. From that hour the new party sensed that this man was destined to be a leader.

In 1860, the new Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln as its candidate for the Presidency of the United States. The Democratic Party split on the issue of slavery and nominated two candidates. Lincoln was elected.

In opposition to Lincoln's views on slavery, the southern states began to pass ordinances of secession, and went to work to found a new nation, the Southern Confederacy. The President-Elect had to sit helplessly by while the Buchanan Administration made futile efforts to hold the Union together.

Lincoln was caught now between the inexorable forces of his day. The light of personal happiness was passing forever out of his life. He told his friend Judge Gillespie, "I have read upon my knees the story of the Son of God in Gethsemane. I am in the Garden of Gethsemane now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing."

He prepared now to go to Washington. He settled his business affairs, and went to visit his father's grave and spend a day with his step-mother. On the day that he left, the people of Springfield gathered about the train. Lincoln stood upon the platform of the last car to bid his neighbors farewell and, in a broken voice, ask for their prayers.

A great throng greeted him in Indianapolis where he spent the first night of his journey. Everywhere along the line huge crowds gathered, but the train by-passed Baltimore where already a plot had been formed to assassinate him. Even in the hour of his inauguration men openly placed bets that Abraham Lincoln would never live to be President of the United States.

At the Inaugural General Scott surrounded him with hundreds of guards. In his speech he made two significant statements. He declared that he did not propose to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it already existed. He also declared that no State had a lawful right to secede from the Union, and he hoped that the insurrection in the South would be brought to an end without bloodshed.

The early days of his administration revealed the forces set against him. Office seekers tried to make the Whitehouse their headquarters. His political enemies harrassed him. Seward, the Secretary of State, began to usurp the final authority of the administration. Every mail from the south brought threats of death and drawings of

stilettos dripping blood.

The war between the States began at half-past four o'clock on the morning of April 12, 1861, with the bombardment of Fort Sumter, by order of the Governor of South Carolina. The war fever which had burned in the veins of both the North and the South broke into open flames. In a thousand cities, towns, and villages throughout the Nation the mad fever of hate inflamed the minds and tongues of men. Even the churches began to preach and to pray against one another, and when the Southern denominations seceded the last tie that bound the States together was broken.

Every hour that Lincoln could take from administrative duties, he spent with the soldiers. They soon came to know him as a man of strong moral convictions and deep personal affections. Lincoln never drank, and he also disliked profanity. One day he was going out to visit a hospital in a mule-drawn ambulance. They had to travel six miles over a rough corduroy road. The driver directed a constant volley of oaths at the beasts.

Lincoln leaned forward, touched the driver on the shoulder, and said, "Excuse me, my friend, are you an Episcopalian?"

The surprised driver looked around. "No, Mr. President, I am a Methodist."

"Well, I thought you must be an Episcopalian, because you swear just like Governor Seward, who is a Church Warden."

The driver stopped swearing.

From the outset Lincoln was the personal friend of every soldier he sent to the front, and somehow every man seemed to know it. The opening days of the war went badly for the Union and the bloody, beaten troops marched wearily back into Washington. Lincoln went down the line shaking hands with the wounded men, saying, "God bless you, God bless you." They began to say to one another, "He cares for us; he makes us fight, but he cares."

He did care. Many days, Lincoln, tired unto death, would close the day with a visit on the men in the wards. He visited Union and Confederate wounded alike.

On one occasion Lincoln heard a seriously wounded soldier laughing. He waved at the President with a weak white hand holding a tract given him by a well-dressed lady who had just passed through the ward. He said, "Mr. President, that lady just gave me a tract on the 'Sin of Dancing' and both of my legs are shot off". Abe Lincoln stood and laughed through his tears with that brave lad.

Time and time again he wrote under the sentence of death passed on some youth who had grown homesick and deserted, these words: "Suspend execution of orders until further notice." The War Department once brought to his attention the case of a young man who deserted from the regular army before the war. However, at the beginning of the war he volunteered, help raise a regiment, was made an officer, and was severely wounded in a battle charge. Then an old-timer of the regular army recognized and exposed him as a deserter. Lincoln's comment was, "Have you not read in the scripture about the 'shedding of blood' being 'the remission of sin'? Give the boy his pardon."

He said over and over again, "If a man has no friends, I'll be his friend." Once he got out of bed and rushed over to the War Telegraph Office to make sure a death sentence set for the morning was put off.

A Confederate rough-rider was awaiting execution when his young wife came to Lincoln with a pitiful plea. After Lincoln had heard her through, he said, "I will pardon your husband and turn him over to you."

The woman broke into tears, sobbing beyond control.

Lincoln remarked, "My dear woman, if I had known how badly it was going to make you feel, I would never have pardoned him."

"But you don't understand me," the woman cried.

"Yes, I do, and if you don't go away at once I shall be crying with you."

She knelt to give thanks for the release of her husband, but Lincoln lifted her to her feet saying, "Don't kneel to me but thank God and go."

It was not long until the boys and men in the army began to call him with reverential affection, "Father Abraham."

Day by day his cross grew heavier. He was saddened by the knowledge that brothers were fighting against one another, and he prayed often for the soldiers on both sides. To this personal grief was added the worry of incompetence among his Generals and intrigue among the members of his Cabinet. At this very time he was plunged into a bitter private sorrow. His two younger boys, Willie and Tad, fell sick.

Lincoln loved children. In the reception lines at the Whitehouse he would often neglect an important public figure to visit with some little girl. He liked to play ball with boys on the Whitehouse lawn. Once he played a game of marbles with some little fellows up to the very steps of the War Department. When his own children became ill Lincoln was distraught. Both Mary and Abe idolized sweet, imaginative little Willie and when it became evident that he was dying, the President's anguish was intent. Mary never again entered the room where he passed away.

Broken by his anxiety for the country, and wounded nigh to death by his personal loss, he leaned more and more on the help of God. From that time he was seen often with a bible in his hand, and frequently he was at prayer. After the death of his son the greatest influence on Abraham Lincoln's life and conduct was to be his dependence upon a personal God.

A fire alarm rang out one night many weeks after Willie's death. The White House Stables were burning. A guard saw a tall hatless man come running from the White House, spring over a hedge, and cry out, "Have the horses been taken out?" Getting the answer, No, he ran forward and with his own hands burst open the stable door. Inside everything seemed on fire. He hesitated a moment, then was making ready to rush in, when men caught him and held him back. Like a sleep-walker the President was led back into the Whitehouse, where he stood looking from a window in the East Room as the fire consumed the dwindling walls. He was weeping, and little Tad realized why and understood. In that stable was a pony that had been Willie's favorite companion.

After the death of Willie a deep companionship grew up between Lincoln and his son, Tad. Tad loved to pile chairs and settees into a living-room barricade and tumble them all at his father when he came into the room. He once ordered a whole load of muskets sent to the White House. Then he imperiously discharged the regular White House guard and mustered into service all the gardeners and servants, giving them guns, drilling them, and putting them on duty for the night. Lincoln loved all this by-play and refused to scold the child.

His re-election in 1864 was but an incident in the terrible war. Foreseeing an end to the conflict, Lincoln began to lay plans for the reconstruction of the Union. In his determination to be merciful to the South he stood like some solitary pine on a lonely summit. He remarked to Senator Henderson, "I am charged with making too many mistakes on the side of mercy, but mercy is and must be the policy of peace."

Then in a speech one day he said, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with a firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his wife, and his orphan - to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves."

As the war grew to a close fanatical abuse was heaped upon the President. The War Department warned him repeatedly that his life was in danger. An unknown marksman actually put a bullet hole through his hat on the streets of Washington. He was warned especially against theatre-going as it made him too easy a target; but he continued to go because it offered an infrequent opportunity to spend an evening with Mary. The Theatre became to him "a sanctum of repose, where his tired soul and body could find a little rest", and his mind some relaxation.

By now the tide of life was running out of the Confederate Army. In one two-weeks period Lee lost 19,000 men as prisoners. This Christian General himself had come to see slavery as a canker and an evil. In his own heart he believed that the States must be joined again in one common Union, if such a Union could be effected with honor. At last he came to the conclusion that the Southern cause was hopeless, and that it was the will of God not that its men die in futile strife but that they be permitted to live for the future.

On April 14, 1865, Lee surrendered to General Grant. The great fire had burned itself out.

Lincoln, whose soul was tuned by nature to gentleness and good will turned with thankful hearts toward a day of peace. He went home and said to Mary, "We have had a hard time of it since we came to Washington; but the War is over, and with God's blessing we may hope now for years of peace and happiness; then we will go back to Illinois, and pass the rest of our lives in quiet."

Mary had made up a Theatre party for that night. The bodyguard who accompanied the President was a well-meaning, but muddled-headed political parasite. After he had ushered the President into his box at Ford Theatre, he pulled a pony of whiskey from his belt and went out to drink with the footman. After singing "Hail to the Chief", the people were seated, the lights dimmed, and the play began.

All were watching the stage now except one man; he was watching Abraham Lincoln. Mary was not very tall and her chair had been placed on a platform so that her shoulders were almost on a level with those of Abe. He put his arm over the back of the chair and across her shoulders. Mary looked up at him, smiled, and said, "Abe, do you think you should? Someone might see us." Lincoln answered, "Who cares, Mary, who cares?"

The door of the box opened quietly and a man holding in his right hand a Derringer pistol stood behind them. He raised the weapon and aimed it steadily at the head of the smiling President. Then - the shot rang out. Lincoln's head fell quietly on his breast, his arms relaxed, the little smile was still on his lips.

Mary screamed. Down in the basement nursery, little Tad heard the scream and in dreadful premonition, cried out, "Oh, daddy --- --- daddy!" They carried the long silent form from the theatre into a plain three-story brick house across the street.

There the precious burden stretched on a cheap iron bed. At twenty-two minutes past seven the next morning Abraham Lincoln died. His long Gethsemane was over; he had found his peace.

Through his tears the President's pastor uttered a last prayer. Ashen-faced and shaking, Stanton looked out into the morning mists across a Nation unmindful of its great loss and said, "Now he belongs to the ages."

In the South General Lee wept, wept for the dark years sure now to come, for the "tree of mercy" had fallen and there was a lonesome place against the sky.

The body of the President was wrapped in an American flag. Four days later, in the rain, it was placed on a train, and Abraham Lincoln was going home again to Springfield; back to the red clays of the Middle West from whence he had come.



